

# THE HOBBY UNIVERSITY

AT COLD WARS, ORIGINS, HISTORICON, AND FALL IN!   
An Interview with Heather Blush 

For quite some time now, Heather Blush has been organizing all manner of painting related activities at the HMGS East's conventions. We decided it was high time we found out more about the educational activities she oversees.

**Wargames Illustrated:** What were your initial reasons for starting the Hobby University, and do you think those same reasons still apply?

**Heather Blush:** I started the Painting University because I believe that historical miniature gaming can be a challenging hobby for newcomers. There are so many things you have to decide – historical era, ruleset, scale AND then you have to learn how to paint figures in order to field them which involves MORE decisions on paint and tools, etc.. That can be overwhelming and many people get stuck right there. I thought offering painting instruction would help “demystify” at least one aspect of this hobby for newcomers which would make their historical gaming experience more satisfying and less frustrating. I had SO many people asking for instruction on how to paint figures at the “Paint’n’Take” it made sense to offer painting classes.

I truly believe that those reasons all still apply but I have learned that our classes

attract plenty of “veteran” gamers also. I’ve discovered that painting is one area that many, many hobbyists are not satisfied with their skill set and would like to improve.

**WI:** How long have you been running the Hobby University, and what were the first activities you ran?

**HB:** We ran a traditional “Paint’n’Take” for the first time at Cold Wars 2005. It was modeled off of events I’d seen at other conventions. The Painting University was started at Historicon 2005. I taught two of the classes by myself – “Beginners” and “Painting for Children” – and I had “outside” instructors for scenery painting and advance techniques from Acheson’s Creations and Pictor’s Studios. We also ran the Painting Competition and Speed Painting contest.

Shortly thereafter, we changed the name from the Painting University to the Hobby University because we were

offering classes on scenery painting, terrain design and construction, and sculpting...way more than just figure painting – so I wanted to make sure we sounded all inclusive and weren’t inadvertently putting people off checking us out.

**WI:** What activities have you added to the schedule over the years?

**HB:** Basing Techniques, Terrain Design, Freehand, Skin Tones & Faces, Painting Horses, Naval Painting, Weathering, Painting Patterns, Tools & Tips, Painting using Mediums, Color Theory for the Historical Painter, Shading and Highlighting, Washes & Glazing, Painting for Competition, Painting Units, Painting Heraldry, Painting Black/ Painting White, Painting the “2 footer” (tabletop quality), Painting Units, Painting Vehicles – We’ve come a long way from the beginning.

We are constantly expanding the classes. We have some really great sculpting classes now. We just added a mold making class. I base new classes on requests we get from our students and also on feedback from our instructors.

Additionally, we run a “bring in” Painting Competition, speed painting and, only at Historicon, we run the “Iron Paintbrush” – a team painting competition modeled after the Iron Chef – it’s part speed painting, part bits bashing. Competitors are given a limited selection of supplies; figures, bits, paint, basing materials, etc. – and they must compete to create the most eye-catching mini-diorama within 1.5 hours. It’s like speed painting on steroids! We had over 20 teams compete last year. It is a total creativity-fest.

**WI:** Do you feel that you are achieving your aims each time you run the event?

**HB:** Quite honestly, YES – I see plenty of new faces at every convention, plus those who have come to be our “regulars”. I am always thinking of ways to make the events better but we’ve grown to the point that we have a solid

10% of the total convention attendees coming through the University, which makes it the single largest “event” at any of the conventions. We regularly have a waiting list for classes – it’s a rare thing for a class not to be full. I am always grateful to the convention attendees who come and take our classes – they are always so appreciative. It makes all of the hard work organizing it worth it. It is practically a full time job at this point – you have to start prepping for the next convention as soon as the last one is over.

**WI:** What’s the best feedback you’ve received from satisfied students?

**HB:** The very best feedback was from one of my “Painting for Complete Beginners” students. He told me that before he took the class he got as far as putting the primer on his first army and then he froze. At the next convention, he brought a completely painted and beautiful army to show me. We gave him the confidence to get his army painted. I think, unfortunately that there are a lot of people like him out there.

My next favorite was the group of gamers who traveled out to Historicon from Seattle, WA. They had never attended an HMGS convention before. Quote “I can get a game anywhere. I can’t get classes like this!” Wow.

**WI:** How have you selected your team of skilled volunteers?

**HB:** My very first instructors were very skilled painters who happened to be very good friends that I shanghaied into teaching for me. They still teach for me. I’ve met and recruited others by networking with various painting groups, forums and through word of mouth. I look for people who have talent AND who can translate their own skills into instruction for others. Also, I believe very strongly that there is no “right way” or one method of painting that is “correct” and choose instructors who feel the same way. We teach what I jokingly refer to as “nondenominational” painting – so a student is more likely to find the best “fit” style-wise for themselves – you could take several beginners classes with different instructors and get something unique from each class. We have also reached the point where we are “growing” our own instructors – I have several people who started as students



Above: Erin Warfield settles her class in for “Painting the 28mm face”.



Above: Don Goddard leads his class through the basics of sculpting.

who are now teaching. I have been very, very fortunate. I wouldn’t be able to run the University without my amazing team.

**WI:** Which companies have stepped up and provide you with regular support?

**HB:** Lon Weiss of Brigade Games is the only reason we were able run these events in the beginning. He understood the value of what we were trying to do immediately and has been a long term supporter. Now, we also get regular support from Reaper Miniatures, Battlefront USA/Flames of War, Renaissance Ink, Kraftmark – ProCreate Putty, Acheson’s Creations, and TheWarStore.com

**WI:** What new activities would you like to add to the schedule?

**HB:** I’d love to add more terrain classes – those have some logistical challenges that I have to figure out since they tend to require either power tools or a hot foam cutter and I don’t want to damage anyone. I’d love to offer some classes on “water effects” – both for terrain and for figures. We have had requests for painting ships, planes and such but finding someone to donate those figures has proven to be a major obstacle. I’d also like to bring in some “named” painters and sculptors in to teach classes.

**WI:** Thanks very much for your time Heather, it has been great finding out more about this program that helps so many people gain more confidence in such an integral facet of our hobby.



Above: Dorothy Catapano briefs one of her classes before they get started on painting tanks.

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We hope you’ve enjoyed this follow-up article from our Cold Wars 2010 coverage from WI271. If you’d like to participate in the Hobby University in the coming months you can do so at Origins, Columbus OH, or at HISTORICON, in Valley Forge, PA:

[www.HISTORICON.org](http://www.HISTORICON.org)